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SOME IDEAS ON THE POSSIBLE OCCURRENCE OF TRUE ELEPHANTS IN THE AMERICAS

UNTIL AS LATE AS THE AGE OF DISCOVERY

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There have been speculations that, apart from mammoths and mastodons, true elephants may have existed in the Americas, e.g. contemporaneous with the Maya civilization, and even perhaps as late as the European "Age of Discovery" (which, for the Europeans, indeed it was).

The famous "Ingram Report" (1) is often mentioned in this respect. Ingram had been a British sailor, who in 1568 was set ashore on the coast of the Gulf of Mexico and from there travelled, by foot, towards the Nortwest, until he reached the Atlantic coast, where he was taken on board of a French ship. He reported having seen, in the country he traversed, "elephants", as well as another "monstrous beast" which may, or not, refer to a mastodon.

Similar stories were, it is alleged, reported by certain Indian chiefs to the "Great White Father", when they visited the US president in Washington. This would give a date, for these elephant stories, of shortly before or after 1800 AD. Accor-

ding to the famous cryptozoologist Bernard Heuvelmans, mammoths and/or mastodons survived in North America at least until the 18th century, particularly in Alaska (2).

Of course there is the very real possibility that we have, in said stories, only a collection of confused or mistaken "identifications", that Ingram, or the Indian chiefs, failed to recognize the difference between elephants, mammoths and mastodons.

Be that as it may, the question could rightly be asked: <u>if</u> true elephants really were present in the Americas, if the Mayan sculptors really wanted to depict elephants (and not mammoths or mastodons), and if Ingram and the Indian chiefs really meant elephants, would that, in itself, be proof that said American (true) elephants were indigenous to the Americas? Couldn't they rather have been imported?

This may sound like a rather wild idea to some. But the idea is not so "wild" as it may seem, after all. Variants of the so-called "elephant tablet", on which (it seems) a true elephant is depicted, have been found in Peru as well as in the enigmatic "Burrows Cave" in North America, and the inscription thereon has been deciphered by Kurt Schildmann, a German linguist, as a version of the Sanskrit script and language of ancient India (3).

We must not forget that the ancient civilizations of India, and South East Asia generally, were in possession of large ocean-going fleets with enormous vessels, easily capable to transport (supposedly young) elephants to distant countries. The very old and very intimate interconnections between South East Asia and the Americas have by now been proved ad nauseam. So, there is nothing intrinsically absurd in the idea of ships from southern India, Kambodja or Java bringing, presumably as presents, young elephants to rulers of distant countries like Peru or Mexico. From where they might have found their way, also as presents, to the former advanced civilization ("mound builders") on the territory of what is today the United States of America (4).

According to the late (former Harvard professor for marine biology) Barry Fell, "knowledge of elephants was brought to the New World by voyagers from both east and west" (5). I would propose that, at least with respect to the west, i.e. the Pacific, it was not only the knowledge but the real animals as well. That African vessels arrived at the American coasts (which doubtless they did on more than one occasion) with African (even young) elephants on board, I would rather been inclined to doubt for several reasons. Above all the African, Black civilizations didn't possess, it seems, ships of such proportions as did the South East Asian civilizations.

(1) David INGRAM: Land Travels 1568-1569 from the Rio Minas in the Gulf of Mexico to Cape Breton in Acadia. Reprint El Paso 1947.

(2) Bernard HEUVELMANS: Annotated Checklist of Cryptozoology. *Cryptozoology*, 5: 1-26, Tucson 1986.

(3) Kurt SCHILDMANN: Zwei Weltsensationen. *Efodon Synesis*, 23, 1997.

(4) Roger G. KENNEDY: Die vergessenen Vorfahren. Die Wiederentdeckung der indianischen Hochkulturen Nordamerikas. Munic 1996.

(5) Barry FELL: America B.C. New York 1976 (p. 184).